MOODS AGAIN

Poems

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1

Yes there are moods
that come over us
at any odd
time of day --

Brief moments of
bright or dark,
sometimes heavy or
sometimes so light --

But why do they
come to us anyway,
why can't we just go on
even and steady?

….
2

Thinking of you still
and I know that
I most likely
always always will

You had just the right
combination, I guess
and it was something I
really needed so much

Oh just the sound of
your voice, just the
look of your smile, your eyes
your soft skin, your touch

….
3

You used to make
my heart stop
and then start again,
yes it's so true

But now only
too much coffee
does anything
at all like that

Now how everything
has gotten so dull
and flat, quite dismal
really, yes everything

….
4

I haven't kissed your --
Oh I don't want to
be overly specific here,
but I can't help wonder --

I can't help but think
of someone else
and you getting all
wound up together

Doing those same things
we used to do --
it seems unthinkable,
yes how could you?

…
5

Something from elsewhere
comes into us
sometimes somewhere
and even here

Something really
unusual and perhaps
even ancient
or more than that

So every time I
think of you
my very thought
touches your spirit

….
6

Waking up again
after so long asleep
perhaps it was
hours days or years

Trying to awaken
prying back my
lids and then my eyes
to the streaming rain --

To the opening light
the door-slamming wind,
my hands reaching out
to the day, to the night

…
7

World folding back
from world like
ripples reflecting
a streaming face

It is this that I
feel unfolding
unpeeling as it were
somewhere inside

Inside outside and
all around -- that
includes all, everything --
and a door is waiting

…
8

Are you thinking
of me even as
I am thinking
of you?

I wonder sometimes
and I also wonder
if you
wonder too

Opposite worlds
are men and women
it would seem --
where to begin?

…
9

The day is filled
with a thousand
thoughts
if you can see them

Night is filled
with presences
instead --
voices, images

Do you see them
as they gather
in your heart and head ? --
your dream

….
10

Give me the day
back that I
remember so well,
I must have it

If only that I
could see you
standing there
just as you were

So long since
I have seen you
touched you, known
your presence

…
11

I am lying here
thinking of the way
to say
there's something

Something I
can't really put
a word
or an image to

Think of a man
falling down in
the street --
what should he do?

….
12

With these words
I step
into the light
of day

With words
I walk
into the wind
light spray

My thought
a calculation
of this one
secret way

….
13

Getting older
is a kind of
experiment -- that's
how I think of it

Yes it' s still me
and every day
something's the same
and different

How I'm changed
and yet I am not,
the world around different
but not I

…
14

Inside my mind
there is a
another,
listening searching

Inside my heart
there is
another,
fearing and hoping

Inside my shadow
is another
shadow
and another sun

…
15

Days are measured
out in hours
minutes, nights
in something else

Years are measured
out in seasons
but seasons
themselves can't be

Nights and seasons
these unmeasured,
mentioned
but hardly known

…
16

The deeper life
underneath
the surface of
the calendar --

A pool on which
the dead leaves
float as though
drifting through clouds

And underneath
the dead leaves --
pools of faces with
candles lit, unlit

…
17

So many and so few
the pairs of eyes
the speaking mouths
and those spoken to

So old and so new
but always so
familiar, these
such odd expressions

Where did we
ever get them all,
did they ever suit us?
Who can tell?

…
18

You I was never
able to find --
didn't know
where you were

Streets reaching out
to the spinning
horizons -- which,
which way ?

The globe was
a bursting
dandelion puff --
seeds of lives

…
19

Squeeze out
a few drops more
from the rag
of my face

A candled drop
is sometimes felt
long after
the wax is dry

And yet I can
never stop
bleeding into
this tapestry

...
20

Love came to me
in the night and
in a dream
spoke silently

I am not allowed
to say what
it was he
would convey

A burning form
and yet dark face
like the medallion
of that room

21

Morning and
morning's light --
this room and I'm still
thinking of you

Not as you were
but as you
might be, if
you were here

Other selves we
become when others
take hold of us,
other lives

…
22

Light veins open
the eyes inside me
lighting their candle
letting them see

Puzzling shadows
cast up on the
enclosing wall,
still there

Other times
are living
inside me, other
faces, voices

…
23

Wind and rain and
the clouds so
turbulent in
the night storm

The house is
held inside
a wind tunnel
by shaking hands

Invisible, the powers
are invisible
that batter things
that break things

…
24

I am trying to
feel my way
forward into
the new life

Great trepidation,
a nervousness
everywhere
through me

Like someone
inching out
onto the ice asking
how thick, how thin

…

25

Health of the body
and the mind --
lemon slices of light
in my closed eyes

Green paisley
teardrops of
the peacock's tail
behind my brow

Leaves and flowers
opening, climbing
upward toward
my inner sunlight

…
26

The long road
reaching out
through the green
and empty valley

Dust eddies blown
across the
gritty surface
of dull tin

Light is harsh,
hills high around
are the color
of clay flower pots

…
27

In the times of
war and revolution
cities countries burning,
where was I?

Yet I was present
somehow for
the overwhelming efforts
of those ages

I was present
somehow in
the enormous exertion
of men, of women

…
28

What one can think
another may think,
where was I
as you wondered?

Where are you now
as I am thinking
now and here --
of this, of you?

The human joins
to the human
in use of mind, this
living rationality

…
29

[Emily Dickinson]

You my great spirit
almost a kind of saint,
the light of sheer intelligence
shines in your face

No one is like you,
yet so long ago --
O how many days,
days, weeks, years --

Yes so far to travel,
trying to reach back --
entirely impossible --
things I shall never know

…
30

My only life this
seems in a way
anti-climactic,
after eternity --

That other realm
where I must have been
before my advent here
among living men

Now where am I?
sometimes I wonder --
is this really me? --
this light, this silent day

…

31

Do I really have to
die one day?
I barely lived
and so therefore, why?

What kind of day
will it be, I ask myself
who will be around me
or will anyone?

And yet in a way
no one can be,
and we must steel
ourselves inwardly

…
32

All the beautiful
things I've seen
heard, had somehow --
a special knowledge

So persistent in
memory they seem
to beckon there,
in some way

Even the simplest
thing -- a window with rain,
or the streets downtown
on a given day

…
33

How many lives
are inside of one?--
there is a kind
of restless power

An exploding in
every moment
of our life -- even now
can't you feel it?

Where is my hand
leading my hand
my legs my legs,
my thought all thought?

…
34

Looking at the rain
in the street outside,
grainy November town
and a parking garage

Houses painted green
brown and red
on the opposite way,
the people all at work

Windows give back
bare windy branches
and low clouds
of dim gray and dark gray

…
35

Bright plasma sky
burning with
turquoise and green,
luminous winter

Thunder heads
of snow clouds,
floating marble quarries
in pink light hollows

Now, Jupiter's moons
and opal streamings
in the far distance --
so bright and cold

…

36

Windy fountain,
a willow tree steps
through your sparkling,
there not there

Then a waterfall
is flashing up,
skeins of snow
slowly falling

Sun is burning in
rainbows of white depths
now misted, now
vanished in the blue

…
37

Think of the spirits
that gather somehow
around us, do
you feel them?

And some are
benevolent, they
bring instruction,
grace and light

Others are quite
different, trying
to strangle, kill -- seething
in the atoms of the night

…
38

You are someone
I haven't seen in
so long, yet still
I remember

You were someone
I only knew
a while, yet now
I must still --

And I think we
always somehow
will -- somehow
in another life still

…
39

A green leaf on
my forehead
fallen down from
somewhere high

I'm lying in
the shade and yet
rising through
the pond clouds

My hands reach
into the roots and
through the sky,
but where am I?

…
40

Spirit is moving
in the world
like sunlight streaming
past the hill

Spirit is opening
the sun, and light
streams through
the tree's colander

Spirit is burning
in the light, light
smothered with darkness
that now is fading

…

41

Wet leaves dry
at length, the sun
after a while --
changes everywhere

A dry cool air
in autumn, clear
and bright, and I
can see so far

Clear seeing and
clear being, what I
most need now
and not to be disturbed

…
42

The emptiness
I step into as I
cross September's field
filled with light

A loneliness and
yet more than
that, the pure existence
of something --

Of many things,
new burgeonings
of next year somewhere,
though not right here

…
43

Footsteps unheard
unseen in the air
of time, the floors
of heaven creak

Movements unseen
unknown passing
over the earth,
yet leaving scars

I am trying to
grasp the present
by the future, through
hints, traces

…
44

Simply to stand
and move, to walk
to the door or
even to the store --

I have a dentist
appointment
coming up, looking
forward to it too

Moving into and
out of places,
saying hello, seeing
those we know

…
45

Show me the new
world that will
come to be, show me
the trillion faces

I would see the
beauty in each one,
each an immortal
irreplaceable soul

I want to see
the future happiness
of everyone, I
want to see it all

…
46

Summer evening
and light steeps --
a hot afternoon
so still and dry

My blinds have
shadow bars
like wavered lines
on the pool's bottom

Off-white walls --
so faintly green,
and slashes of sun
are stretched across

…
47

The soul of Man
and Woman,
souls of women
and of men

These are present
in the light and
in the shadows
of the world

These are present
living-- and yet
where? yet still
I know them

…
48

A mind is tearing
the world's fabric,
longitude latitude
like tailor's chalk

Provisional stitching
of borders pulled
apart impatiently
for new adjustments

Who is working
through the clothing
that grows so heavy
stiff with blood?

…

49

You who are
reading me,
in what world
do you lie?

In what earthly
time or in what
unearthly? yet,
intersection

Miles and miles,
years of light -- I,
entirely trapped
behind these words

…
50

Angels speak in
evening's quiet,
the lamplight
rings with voices

Angels, powers of
light building
crystals in
the charred sunset

Voices of the
furious spirits --
as earth is rushing
toward the stars

…
51

Grass is filled
with shadows
in the morning
and in the evening

But at midday
it burns pure
green as blue
as any sky

Light in columns,
cylinders of
of effervescent air,
floss points of day

…
52

Shadows now
are heavy as
the boughs themselves
with steep light

Bright plasma sun
is building,
a crust of leaves
is breaking up --

Beams sketch out
light crystals
in the tree's still
moving darkness

…
53

Sunset is a hole
burned through
the sky's paper,
depths of fire beyond

Burnt sky darkens
and a scorch mark
stains each cloud,
the paper shrinking

See the fragments
of invisibility
falling now from
light-spotted forms

…
54

Spray wind so cold
with burning pricks of rain,
the gust blows
through the staggerers --

The trees that wave
gray sleeting
from their faces and
blown back scarves

Their arms swimming
a breast stroke
before breaking off --
these water treaders

…
55

An animal may die
and yet a man
cannot, he dies
yet he is never dead

Like a knot hole
in a tree, rings
of duration
echo out around him

His form is there
hollowed out in
woven passages
infinite cuttings can't remove

…
56

You whom I think of
so often and yet
can never again see,
do you think of me?

And yet I can't
imagine that you do,
your life so crowded
bright and visible

So many know you
as you go from
place to place, and yet
whom do they know?

…
57

You've left me here
far in your wake,
or should we say instead
that time has left?

Threads drawn away
from each like
translucent cornsilk
and the grain lies there

And your woven script
dense and precise
inviting questions,
never giving too much

…
58

Times when I really
can't understand
why you didn't love me
with fine threads of rain

Where were you
as I gathered puddles
from each corner
of the city?

Pouring them all
in front of you -- I
should have done it then --
fine threads of rain

…
59

Thinking of all the time
that's passed, the river
runs on and on,
it knows no end

Is it diminishment
I feel or is
there something
building up instead?

Things grow apart
and yet together,
we are apart
and yet somehow near

…
60

That everyone might
have everything
they need, I think
of this sometimes

Give the day to
this one and
the night to that,
giving the sky to all

Food clothing shelter
and the skies themselves
exploding outward
in resplendent stars

…
61

Hands come to hands
to aid and comfort,
light filters in through
the close drawn blinds

Mind comes to mind
giving instruction,
light dawning in
new horizons there

Heart comes to heart
to bestow what the
city needs so that
it bring forth its living art

…
62

Clouds build so high
in the light, breaking
up, cut through by
light's fine strands

Billows of clouds
with huge hollows
perhaps miles across,
the air so charged

Energy aquarium --
whole airliners fish
lurking place of lightning,
spaces of infinite form

…
63

Light behind my lids
when I close my eyes
seethes in the dark
that I hold inside

Eyelids are leaves,
my skin chlorophyl --
my eyes themselves
are thinking green

When eye and mind
are joined together
green beyond green
seen known everywhere

…
64

My mind pulses now
inside my eyes,
the eyes inside me
though my deeper eyes

Mind breathes in
the time like air,
draws in long ages
gathered in a day

Mind listens attuned --
what are the strings
of light teaching it,
what can it play?

…
65

Moods come to us
and we don't know why,
they arrive like the
weather from the sky

Who can say what
the reason really is,
maybe there's some
secret buried deep

The gate of trees
looks so different,
crossed by noon light
and the dry gray leaves

…
66

Where will I be when
I am finally dead?
Will I move through
some bright other space --

Ages and infinities
streaming through
my outstretched fingers
touching webs of stars?

Or will a burning cone
be set down somewhere,
a scroll of fiery letters --
angels -- furled inside?

…
67

Light is a rusty
tap water
through the blinds
so suddenly

Clouds are passing
then gone --
basket weave window,
illuminated bars

Then light's gas jet
is lowered
just a bit -- the walls
a cool faint green

…
68

In the eye of the outside
whole acres are
stray bits of
paper blown by

The clouds fracture
with lightning,
the rain spins
a tunnel around

In the eye of the outside
I am flying,
exploding -- calling
four dimensions at once

…
69

Steps in the mind
looking to see
listening to see
what they can find

No one can know
where I am going
where I am destined
determined to go

Moon in the trees
watching listening
owl in the moon
waiting for something

…
70

The feather rising
in every breath
taken in the warm air
and light's explosion

Light is a pine cone
bursting its seeds

of space -- dimensions
shattering around

The furnace door
of day is opened wide,
your breathing, your
walking are within

...
71

Rain through the
leaves in my face
as I turn around
and around

I make a corkscrew
of my vision
and the tree's bole
the sides of a cork

O the upside down
bottle of the tree,
green bright wine
of leaves and light

…
72

Breathing in the
new grassy rain
that comes in
through the window

The field and the
wet ground in
my room the field
and its grass

The field and
its new grass
memories of long
past far inside

…
73

Light suffusion there
behind my eyes,
a pulp of dark light
with active forms

A swarming of points
building, burgeoning
in that most intense
yet indivisible space

Secrecy here hears
its own silence, there
where the soul
gathers its living names

…
74

What does it mean
these two arms?
See these arms that
reach from shoulders

What does it mean
to have a hand
four fingers and
one thumb opposite?

Wondering puzzlement
captures thought
when we look, gaze
at each other, at ourselves

…
75

To kill any living thing,
the greatest crime
and nothing
can make up for it

However great
you think you are,
there is nothing greater
than this hand --

Nothing greater than
this small bird too,
the fine articulations
of its wings

…
76

Blind with sunset's
needle through
my eye, light spurt
through the trees

The infinitely sharp
bright beam splits
the world in half,
fission of evening

How swift the clamorous
worlds striking off
from this one -- see
the shadows fleeing

…
77

Moods come over me
that I've had before
like a sudden
light across the wall

Or a sudden wind
down through
the hall that
slams the door

Something beneath
within each one
of them, still
unnamed, still unknown

…
78

My vision out
onto the lawn
with its one tree
and the wire fence

And the light patch
right before the
current of shadows,
just past the house

Lines through this scene
like the frost hairs
in an ice cube -- yet
round what center?

…
79

It is July now
and in the
evening
the light is sepia

The middle of
the year is
passed -- no more
bright nine o'clock

The middle
of the year
is passed now,
gone forever

…
80

Where are my
steps leading
as I open
these pages' paths?

Retracing the
opening furrows
of the sea
after the ship

Drawing the
candle's flame
back from
star-like drops

…
81

The child is born
the scalpel
is set between
its legs excising

A scream cuts
through
the room
shrill and tearing

Now how many
shatters through
the windshield
root-like, fanning out?

…
82

Is not a man
is not a woman
a work of art,
crystalline structure?

To harm one
I would no more
than to smash an
ancient and perfect vase

This fragile surface
this exquisite
beauty of form and
the spirit within

…
83

Lying on the grass
above the clouds
are pulling the
trees their way

No breeze down
here at all
my face touched
by dandelions

But way up there
there must be
such a strong current
in that clear high air

…
84

Wind shadows
in the field,
the corn is combed
darkened waves

As though before
a storm when
water grows dim
and roughs up

Now in bright noon
see the fields
of the green corn,
this turbulence

…
85

Waiting to, trying
to get over
this latest illness --
look ahead

Thinking of all
the things
I'll do when
I'm well again

It will be like
a new life ,
how nice the idea
of that new day

….
86

Leaves floating in
the sun with
strands of gold,
fledged bright grass

A chevron of blue
wavering, wood
knot of sky
in the stream's bark

Sun water poured
down around me --
visage of transformations,
knowing light

…
87

Night tree under
the moon's frost,
and the tree is
full of shapes

Arms and fingers
breaking outward
gathering light,
the attempt of space

Hand of the tree
touching softly and
every way known
and unknown forms

…
88

Earth of Homer and
of Hesiod I have
not seen you enough
not looked at you enough

Earth of burning skies
streaming and
luminous clouds, my years
have been too few

Masterworks of genius
overwhelming glory
and amazing art,
yet more amazing light

…
89

Rain in the morning
and so many years
within each breath
bending time

I open the curtain
see the street
swift with water
and the trees so green

Cool misty rain
is pounding everything,
seasons flash forward
but I linger behind

…
90

Bright clouds of
afternoon over
the green valley and
the hill's steep shadow

How sovereign high
and pure, these
silent and radiant forms
passing slowly overhead

Hill and shadow
and valley and rows
of flowing corn and
the blue sky high above

…
91

Morning's light is
poured through
the leaky blinds, light
spray tinting the walls

I rise and try to
make adjustments
but get a gold beam
right in my eye

Now my dyke
of four walls
is being broken down,
washed into day

…
92

Morning comes
and night fades out,
pulled down by stars
and its dark freedoms

Objectivity clarity,
the named and
not the anonymous --
all re-emerge

Once again and
yet once again
and yet slowly too,
the Good succeeds

…
93

Stepping now into
the end of time,
my time and
not the world's

A kind of silent
antechamber
to an elsewhere
and an otherwise

Conduct is the tight rope walk
beyond the known,
the way, the style of
standing at this threshold

…
94

You overmastered
with beauty, do you
grasp a form,
do you grasp a soul?

Seed pod of day
bursting into light,
the sun exclaiming
down its corridors

Yet in the human,
exquisite beauty
holding all of that
light setting it apart

…
95

Like a pinwheel
the world burns and
spins into
strewn charred pieces

Who can say
what it will do
what it will be
even in one year?

And yet whatever
and yet whenever,
there must be listening and
charity for the stranger

…
96

Those who have died
five thousand years ago
before too long a time
I will be joining you

The body once dead
this life left behind
it must be we are then
purely discarnate mind

Thought speaks to thought
no matter the distance between
then we will see what was sought
know what was heard and seen

…
97

Thinking with my
cup of coffee
near me now and my
thoughts somewhere

Are they over,
around, up
above me or somehow
in my brow?

What is thinking,
and what is mind --
what is a person
anyhow?

…
98

Light of a new time
and I would step
out into it,
I would be there

And I would restore
all those others
too, the many
who went before

If only there were
some way somehow
to do it, somewhere
the magic door

…
99

There is a music
of every time --
try to find it now,
try to hear it

There is a vision
for each land --
try to see it,
try to make it real

There is a world
inside the world,
build it -- see it, hear it
and make it whole

…
100

You who are
reading me,
in what world
do you lie?

When will truth
pass from me
to you or else
from you to me?

When will we
see each other
face to face, and know
each other truly?

AFTERWORD

Encounters With the Author in Taipei

We first made the author's acquaintance at a well-known restaurant in Taipei, the Wysteria Tea House, famous as having been a meeting place for dissident intellectuals in the years of political struggle in Taiwan .

During the recent effort to publish his rather extensive work, we had occasion to discuss aspects of his past and current writing.

Your poetry is quite varied in style and in form. Where do you locate yourself in the overall debate concerning poetic form?

I consider myself an eclectic. The main thing for me is to grasp, mentally, a certain object -- that is, an experience, a scene, an event -- to see it and feel it. Any language that seems to convey the reality of that is good, any which remains merely language, merely words, is for me of no interest, in some cases it is actively negative, in the sense of being obstructive.

A cliche?

Yes or not even a cliche but in a way worse than that. Much of our language obscures the nature of reality. Words in themselves

are, in a sense, the enemy of writing. I tell students that all the time. Words most often merely convey the usual accepted social understanding. Writing is for the purpose of grasping reality itself, which is always something other than the social understanding.

Do you consider yourself a political writer?

All writing is political in the sense of attempting to correct these false social understandings. At times its purpose is to merely reveal with a new freshness, a perceptual freshness, as it were. But even this itself has a certain basic political significance, in the sense that awakened human beings will act and think differently than those who are at rest in the normal tranquilized non-perception that we usually are caught up in.

Does living outside the United States help or hinder your writing?

I think it helps, in general. It is in some ways a very undeveloped culture, yet in other ways it is overbearing. (The US, that is.) There is, for example, a great deal of rather stifling political correctness, as it's called, and to get away from that is itself a positive thing. For a while I had no idea how I would ever get all this material published, especially if you're not there trying to do all the "networking" that is needed, and which I was absolutely terrible at anyway -- worse than terrible, I really had no clue, I still don't, I suppose. And then it came about that you could just do it all by yourself, by means of the internet.

How much material is it? It's quite a lot, it would seem.

Yes, I guess it's about 40 volumes or so. Over 2,000 pages, if you want to measure it like that. I don't know how much it would

weigh.

There seem to be many styles represented. Was that something you consciously strove for?

Yes. I always wanted to be able to represent a wide variety of experiences. My first models for the artist were people such as Picasso, Goethe, Bach -- artists who could work in a very wide range of forms and even use widely different styles. Of course, I can't compare myself to people like that, but it was still a goal, to try many types of things.

What sorts of things are you working on currently?

Well as you know I am trying to get all this existing work published, going through it, touching it up here and there, proofreading, and so forth. After that, I think I might return to some translating work -- Holderlin especially, and some Chinese poets, but don't ask me which ones.

All right, but can you say whether they are modern or classical?

Classical. My favorite is Mung Hao-Ren, actually.

There are many other things to talk about, but perhaps that's a good note to end on for now.
But what were you trying to do in these poems in particular?

It is a sequel to other volumes in which I've experimented with different song-like forms. Here the influences are Prevert, Creeeley, Williams, various Italian poets – Sandro Penna, Quasimodo, Ungaretti.

About the Author

Steven Frattali is an expatriate American writer living in Taipei. He is the author to date of over 40 volumes of poetry, totaling over 2,000 pages of work. He is also the author of several critical works, among them *Person, Place and World: A Late Modern Reading of Robert Frost* and *Hypodermic Light: The Poetry of Philip Lamantia and the Question of Surrealism.*

About the Banyan Press of Taipei

The Banyan Press of Taipei was founded in 2008 by Samuel Palmer and Steven Frattali. It plans to publish the work of expatriate Anglophone writers of the Pacific Rim who are working outside the norms of mainstream publishing. The Press does not at this time invite submissions, but it hopes to do so in the future.